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UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN
SANTIAGO, CHILE, APRIL 1985

CEPAL

Review

Santiago, Chile

Number 25

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Culture, discourse (self-expression) and social development in the Caribbean

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Cultural domination is an important phenomenon throughout the developing world, but it is even more so in those countries which, like most of the Caribbean nations, are still going through the first stages of decolonization. In this connection, the author sustains that the constitution of empires, through which the conquered territories are converted into "fragments of the colonial powers", is also characterized by the imposition of imperial cultures which reduce or eliminate the native cultures, thus restricting the possibility of development, consolidation and self-expression of the dominated peoples. Political decolonization has not eliminated this situation, since the relationship of cultural domination would persist even in the absence of the colonial élites. The author's conclusion is evident: there should be a strengthening and revaluation of the autonomous capacities of the new nations for cultural expression, since this makes it possible for them to build up their own identity and devise indigenous strategies for future development. Following this line of thought, he presents the problem of cultural decolonization in the Caribbean countries, reviewing the problems posed by the diversity of languages, the cultural ambiguity of the middle classes, and others which acquire a particular connotation owing to the multilingual and multicultural nature of the Caribbean area.

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Introduction

The history of the impact of a given population on the physical and social environment in which it has settled explains its size, its growth rate, its differentiation into social groups, strata and classes, as well as the sum of material and spiritual means which ensure its regeneration. The daily practices of the population in question represent an enactment of this history and establish, on the basis of its accumulated experience, what options are viable for the future.

From the day when the Europeans set foot on Caribbean soil, these elementary principles of social life have been in abeyance. The efforts made by the colonized populations to react to their environment have been thwarted or subjected to the colonizers' interests. The geography of the insular or quasi-insular societies which were established following "the European discovery", their demography, sociology, anthropology and economy have to a certain extent become a product of the construction of the great colonial empires—in other words, of the relationship between the colonizers and the "discovered" physical and social environment. Thus, the course of the colonized population's community life, and even that of the private lives of the individuals in the community, have been traced without those involved seeing the other side of the picture; that is, their intimate link with another history and distinctive and indigenous cultural features.

The birth and rebirth of autonomous national entities, often opposed to the colonial empire, was an unforeseen and unavoidable consequence of the imperialistic adventures. The aim of social science is to determine how, amid colonial dependence and control of the environment, the conditions and aptitudes necessary to achieve this rebirth, this "counter-discovery", are created.

Slowly but surely, the colonizers are losing ground. The progress made by colonized peoples in gaining control over their living conditions takes place within the context of the history of the metropolitan countries and sometimes in opposition to it. In order that this process may be accelerated, it is imperative not only to discover alternatives for survival in a world which is indeed dominated by the metropolitan countries, but also to occupy and control the institutional strongholds built by the people in

response to this domination. In other words, it is necessary to take stock of the autonomous aptitudes for collective initiative and develop them without losing sight of the context in which (and against which) these aptitudes are demonstrated.

The relationship between culture and development generally includes the problems of discourse on culture and development. Such a relationship is similar to that observed between history and historiography. Obviously, the manner in which we write (and perceive) history reflects and guides the part we play in what is to become history. *Mutatis mutandis*, our development strategies are reciprocally conditioned by the verbal expression of our development experiences.

In the Caribbean, however, this problem is further complicated because of the peculiarities of cultural and linguistic structures. The Caribbean is multilingual and multicultural. And between its languages and cultures obtain relations

of asymmetry and domination.

Let us first say that all deliberate participation in what is to become history and in development strategies takes place, in our times, in the dominant languages and cultures. Moreover, the history of the social classes and élites capable of influencing collective projects for the future is a continuation of colonial history, whereas the greater part of the population (and of its élites of artists, priests, healers, village chiefs, etc.) represents the other aspect of this evolution. Finally, and to complicate matters further, the population as a whole, beyond class distinctions, operates in differing degrees and, except in the cases of Haiti and Suriname, in both the dominant and dominated cultures and languages. To suggest an equation between the terms culture, discourse and development, and to offer a demonstration of it, is a far-reaching enterprise; here, we seek only to establish the need for such a venture.

I

Awareness of the issue

I shall use three texts by two of the greatest intellectuals of the Caribbean to define the issues as I see them. These texts, which date back to the late twenties and fifties, are excerpts from the works of Jean Price-Mars and Eric Williams. Far be it from me, I would hasten to add, to consider analysing here the literary production of these authors. I have selected these texts in order to identify the terms of the equation and, at the same time, to show that these issues have been discussed for several decades.

Eric Williams (1959) maintains that the basis of Greek democracy was "the recognition of the political leader as a man of culture, not of culture in the abstract or of intellectual refinement, but of the culture of a whole people, of an entire city, of which he was the representative". In another passage from the same text, he adds: "As a second example of the relation between politics and culture and their interpénétration in Ancient Greece, I would recall Demosthenes in his attack on Aeschines before the Jury of Athens.

The powerful political exhortation was intended for the common man of Athens, the ordinary citizen, integrated into a single electoral body, government and culture".

Williams denies the existence of an indigenous Caribbean culture. In his opinion, the problem of the West Indies lies with the destruction of pre-Columbian culture; except for a few surviving practices, African culture brought by persons reduced to slavery left few traces. He categorically claims that "the West Indian way of life and values are European or American at all levels".

Therefore, according to him, one of the main duties of the political leader is in some manner to create the national culture, either by promoting "all cultural productions which, though not indigenous, are based on an adaptation of European and American legacies", or by making a conscious effort to bring together "the dissimilar threads of culture which make up the West Indies —European, African, Indian,

Chinese, Syrian". "Today", he adds, "the struggle for a national culture is not only part of the struggle for political independence, but also the struggle for bringing about a new social order".

According to Williams, the absence of a specifically Caribbean language constitutes an important obstacle to decolonization which, in his statesman's vision, he sees as the result of a wide integration, "a cultural, economic, commercial and even political confederation of West Indian territories". To him, "this is the greatest nationalism". The following passage, with its numerous inaccuracies, serves as an example of the importance of the problems of social dialogue in the Caribbean and of the enormous difficulties of conceiving and systematizing a linguistic policy within the confines of the objectives of social development: "The main difference between the West Indies and Africa or India in their nationalist struggles is that there is no indigenous language in the West Indies. The language of the imperial power has become the mother-tongue—English in Trinidad, French in Guadeloupe and Haiti, Spanish in Cuba and Puerto Rico, Dutch in Curaçao and Suriname. But because the process started in the days of slavery, these imperial languages have so degenerated as to become, in each territory, a kind of patois, or Creole as it is sometimes called. Whereas Creole is the *lingua franca* of each West Indian territory, there is, by the very nature of this region, no Creole language of the West Indies as a whole. This raises a dual problem: there is no rallying point for the nationalist movements of each territory; the absence of a common language is not only a barrier to contacts and communications between the islands... but also an impediment to a wider co-operation, on the cultural level, among all the West Indian territories".

Price-Mars wrote his famous book *Ainsi parla l'oncle* in 1928 during the occupation of Haiti by the United States. Contrary to Williams, he considers that a Haitian culture does exist. Whether or not it is equipped to control the social environment is a separate question. The difficulty he seems to face is that of increasing the perceptibility and worth of this culture. His concern is apparent from the first sentence of his book: "We have for a long time nourished the ambition of building up the image, in the eyes of the Haitian people, of the value of its folklore". And by folk-

lore, he means the knowledge of the people. In the same range of ideas, the existence of a language is not even questioned, let alone the problem of its relative value. Since Price-Mars does not envisage Caribbean integration in 1928 he has fewer variables to deal with than Williams, and therefore can be more assertive: "In any event, one would easily agree that, as it is, our Creole is a collective creation resulting from the need felt by masters and slaves in former times to communicate their thoughts to one another... For the time being, it is the only instrument used by the masses and by ourselves to express our mutual thoughts. ... As such, jargon, dialect, or *patois*, its social role is a fact which we cannot escape. Thanks to Creole, our oral traditions still exist, live on and evolve, and it is through Creole that we may hope one day to bridge the gap which makes of us and the people two apparently distinct and often antagonistic entities".

However, twenty years later (1948), in a discussion on the problem of the society's political structure, Price-Mars is assailed by the same anguish as Williams: cultural expression is restricted. He identifies the bases of authoritarianism in Haiti and raises the issue of collective thinking as the touchstone of national unity and development. One is tempted to conclude, as he does, that it is essential to build up, in the eyes of the people, the image of the value of the language. He compares the Haitian society towards the end of the last century with that of 1948 in the following terms: "Thus, since the Haitian nation continues to exist, it must be its immaturity that prevents it from expressing its political existence. Is it not therefore more correct to borrow from the North Americans their designation of this state and call ourselves *an inarticulate people*?¹

"Inarticulate people": a term which is supposed to describe a people powerless to express its thought, powerless to express and to assert its will, and reduced, as a result, to a 'confused bunch of individuals', paralysed by ignorance, a herd ready to follow any leader, so long as he is clever enough to impose himself. Such was the situation in 1870-1880, which actually has not changed much since..." (Price-Mars, 1948, pp. 22-23).

¹in English in the original text.

II

The terms of the equation

There are thus three terms to the equation of Caribbean social development: i) the existence of a culture for the encounter of the leader and his people (Williams); ii) the existence of a language to bridge the gap between élites and masses (Price-Mars) and to ensure greater solidarity among the nationalist forces (Williams); and iii) the realization (or science) of the value of this culture and this language (Price-Mars).

On the first point, we could establish, contrary to what is stated by Williams and in agreement with Price-Mars, that there exists a culture (or cultures) in the Caribbean, distinct from that of the colonizers, and that its existence should be distinguished from its capacity to assert itself in all spheres of social life. But rather than delineating these distinctions, our task will be to identify the area which Western culture cannot cover, despite its indisputably dominant position, and which thus become the sphere of collective initiatives, and of the rules by which these are created and enhanced.

As for the second point, Williams' opinion regarding the mother-tongue of the Caribbean peoples is now outdated. We must also set aside the notion that the absence of a Caribbean language represents an obstacle to regional integration. We retain the fact that within each country of the region there is one, and only one, *lingua franca*. Nonetheless, some countries have no national language proper, inasmuch as they use that of the original colonizing country. If it is proven that a specific area exists for the development of a national culture, the fundamental problem of the relationship between culture and development is not altered by the fact that there is no Creole language in the countries formerly under Spanish rule. In their case, the problem of social discourse is apparently simplified, or at least it does not present itself in the same way as

in the rest of the Caribbean.

This problem, in conjunction with that of the value of the national cultures and languages, calls for a distinction between culture and the "discourse" which arises from a given culture. The value of a culture (and a language) is defined by the ability it affords its creators to overcome the obstacles they face. By national discourse or self-expression, we mean the formulas for meeting the challenges of the environment, embodied in the local culture. It will be seen that the value of local cultures and languages is a matter of (class) perception, and, as a result, is an aspect of the logic of the corresponding human sciences. The question to be clarified is that of the conditions in which indigenous creations may be put to a practical use, thus allowing their "value" to be appreciated.

Once that question has been solved, the course of scientific development (knowledge or awareness of the value of national languages and cultures) will have been defined and we shall not pursue the subject further here. Suffice it to say that the development of human sciences aims at the optimum use of the means of social action controlled by the populations concerned, and by them alone. There is thus a need for greater visibility of national cultures and for ensuring exclusive control over the Caribbean environment; such control may be gained by providing the national cultures with the tools indispensable to deal with the context within which and against which they evolve. Interpénétration of politics and culture—that is, the culmination of the democratization processes as described by Williams—will follow. In other words, the control—knowledge and understanding—of the national culture and its value, as the setting in which the politician becomes a man of culture, will be achieved.

III

The fragments of the colonial powers

In order fully to understand the difficulties of achieving an "interpretation of politics and culture" in the Caribbean, it is essential to distinguish, at the risk of repeating commonplace ideas, between two superimposed levels of history in the region (and in every colonized land): that of politics or the State on the one hand, and that of culture or the nation on the other.

The first concept to note is that of national territory which, in the generally insular Caribbean societies, appears to pose no problem. Within the framework of a sociological discussion, a territory is not the arena in which particular relationships arise; the arena is created by these relationships. It is human relations that limit the space and not *vice versa*. This is why the territory of the Carib-Indians, though made up of the same islands that we inhabit today, differs so profoundly from ours.

Hence, when a foreign army and its accompanying institutions (moral persons) take over a territory, that territory and its constituent parts receive a new definition. The redefinition varies according to the nature of the dominant classes of the colonizing nations. An "overseas territory" is created which can exist only within the geography of the colonial power. In fact, one observes an expansion of the conquering nation's territory which, together with that of other colonial empires, ends up by encompassing the whole world.

As for the habitat of the conquered nations, this is presented as a distinct subgroup within the imperial geographies. New meanings, belonging to alien thought-patterns, are imposed upon these territories and their constituent parts. It evidently follows that in the collective thinking of the conquered nations there is an overlapping of two systems of definitions, superimposed upon two systems of social relationships. (In order to facilitate the discussion which follows, it will be understood that the term "conquered nation" refers to all those now existing within borders traced by the colonizers.)

For the past five centuries, the army and other institutions of colonialism have come be-

tween the subjugated nation and its physical and social environment, thus preventing it from giving real expression to its internal differentiation (and therefore to its particular history). They have made it part of a new totality and converted it into one fragment, homogeneous in its essential ignorance and backwardness. A nation has thus become "a people powerless to express its thought, powerless to express and assert its will". It has lost its self-expression and may well be physically destroyed, to the conquering nation's advantage and, more precisely, to the benefit of the latter's dominant classes.

The self-expression or discourse of a nation means the expression of its future, as upheld by the institutions (moral entities, norms, laws and customs) which make up its individuality. A nation ensures its regeneration by means of the institutions through which it gives meaning and form to the environment. Its discourse is this shaping of its continuity, the design of its future physiognomy as a sequence and consequence of a common past. The concept of the discourse or self-expression of a nation is more limited than that of culture; it is an attempt at defining a projection of the national culture into the future. This leads to the observation that a conquered nation may lose the means of deliberately expressing itself while not necessarily losing its culture.

The expansion of the conquered nation's territory brings with it the universalization of its class structure. A bridge is created between two groups, as different from one another as two national societies can be, and the oppressed nation as a whole becomes the most oppressed class of the colonial empire. "The confused bunch of individuals" occupying the new geography is a concrete achievement of the colonizers, and not a mere optical illusion or methodological aspect of the question. This "confused bunch" is the result of a new individuation system, and of its cleavages. A single path to evolution is open to the colonized peoples; there arise the *New Englands* (in which the colonized people are massacred) or the *New Spains* (in which the survivors are sub-

jected to one or another form of oppression). In the first case, the national way of thinking disappears; in the second, the means of expression of this thinking are forever obstructed.

The absence or near-absence of indigenous populations in the Caribbean represents little difference between the region and Latin America as regards conflicts between colonized and colonizers. Blacks transplanted into the Caribbean and elsewhere in America established themselves as conquered nations. The problem is to discover what will become of these conquered nations, Black or Amerindian, in the framework of the development process planned by the metropolitan powers, and how they will free themselves from their new condition as oppressed classes.

As everyone knows, the partitioning of the world by the colonial empires did not take place in an atmosphere of friendship and the powers of that time have met with differing fortunes. The fragments of metropolitan societies responsible for administering and exploiting the colonies suffered the consequences of these rivalries. The difference between the interests of these agents and those of their mother-country became more and more evident. Under the pressure of the local dominant classes (Creoles), these fragments emancipated themselves and formed new countries, called independent "nations".

Two aspects are worth noting. These class struggles imply a certain mobilization of the colonial populations, and are reflected in nationalist struggles. The alliances of classes against the colonial power are expressed in the opposition between the Creoles and the agents of the colonial power. What is more, before these secessions occurred, the independent nation concept did not exist in the vocabulary of Creole America. The great Aztec, Inca and Maya States or Empires, and the *quilombos*, *palenques* or *bush societies* did not regard themselves as independent nations or States.

The nineteenth century independent nation—or more accurately, emancipated nation—is encumbered with aberrations inherited from colonial times. The simple fact was that overseas territories could not, in the eyes of the colonizers, establish themselves as countries, as could the groups that severed their links with the colonial empire; it was inconceivable that the conquered

peoples (independently of the degree of destruction of their own structures) should be considered nations in their own right. The subjugated indigenous nations were not involved in the conflict between Creoles and colonials.²

Both in the colonization process and in the transition from the colonial to the national State, we find double crossroads: on the one hand, those of nations and social classes, and on the other, those of two conflicting ideological positions—two modes of self-expression—each attempting to transform (or change the form of) the existing reality.

The establishment of the emancipated State follows the colonial pattern: the aim of its nation-building process is to transform the natives into a series of identical units of political expression. To achieve this it is necessary to stifle any vision of the future which does not coincide with that of the dominant classes. There is thus no difference between the emancipated national State and the colony, as far as the functioning of the official ideology is concerned. This explains why, when the colonial powers lost their immediate hold on their overseas territories, the institutions they had set up could survive these revolutions and remain as remote as ever from the attitudes of the local populations.

Nevertheless, the country of the Creole differs from the colony, inasmuch as it attempts a form of nation-building which implies both constant conflict and constant dialogue with the former colonial power. Indeed, it is this double implication which characterizes this special type of nation. The destruction of the conquered peoples is now pursued with a view to their integration into a large national family. The State claims to "educate" the native in order to endow him with a new identity: the official self-expression, the *Creole* word.

States born of the break-up of colonial empires differ from those which created such empires in two essential ways: in the rigidity of their borders and in the nature of their class

²"La patria del criollo... no era de modo alguno la patria del indio... La tierra ganada, involucra al indio. Y cuando el criollo tiene la vivencia del legado recibido de sus mayores, de 'lo que hoy gozamos', el indio está allí como algo que existe junto a la tierra y existe para trabajarla." (Martínez Peláez, pp. 254-255).

relations. It is seldom pointed out that they are in fact the only States confined to a single fixed territory. Not only do the colonizing countries own the so-called overseas territories, but their political activities have worldwide importance, as in the best years of the earlier centuries.

What is more, a metropolitan country is a national unit in which a gradual process of class differentiation took place. An emancipated State is a set of social classes which is always in the process of becoming a nation. Even though the behaviour of the dominant classes may be identical in the two cases, there is still a basic distinction between them, as far as concerns the result of their behaviour: the dominant classes of the metropolitan countries cater for the needs of the State and must thus maintain the national cohesion which gave rise to their own existence; in the emancipated States, the dominant classes, in order to safeguard the peculiar political apparatus under their control, have to ensure that the nation-building process never reaches a stage of evolution that can complete it. The country of the Creole is a project which is constantly being regenerated as a further project. It is this regeneration which creates the *Creole*, and serves as a basis for the limited cohesion from which the dominant local classes arise.

In sum, the emancipated State is confined within a territory inherited from colonialism and within a future which is part of that of the former metropolitan country. The national territory remains in fact a fragment of the metropolitan country's territory, and the future of the independent State forms part of the future designed by the metropolitan country.

The context of the indigenous nations is in contrast with this situation. Colonial exploitation, by silencing their self-expression, keeps their dai-

ly practices within the boundaries of their visible environment and short-term time horizon. The problem is further complicated by the fact that, as time goes on, and as the metropolitan countries tighten their control on the environment, the social category formed by the Creoles becomes obsolete. The original division of this group into social classes becomes increasingly visible and the dominated sectors find themselves in a situation ever closer to that of the indigenous population. In other words, the number of citizens actually able to control or simply influence the emancipated State is steadily reduced.

At the same time, the nation-building project deteriorates at each reformulation. The Creole nation and its emancipated State lose their *raison d'être*, as their control over the environment diminishes. It becomes increasingly difficult to recognize the limits of the national territory and to safeguard the State's capacity to define a plan for the future, even in the medium term. More and more, the national economies and emancipated governments find themselves operating within confines of time and space delimited by the metropolitan country's proposals for the future.

To remedy this uncomfortable situation, the former colonies, or, shall we say, the underdeveloped countries, have taken action on two fronts: on the one hand, we see the creation of regional integration projects and the mobilization of the non-aligned in quest of the establishment of a new international order; on the other hand, we have the emergence of nationalist movements, or the creation of new class alliances aimed at redefining both State and nation. It is in this latter context that the issue of the relationship between culture, discourse (self-expression) and development arises.

IV

National interests and class interests

Very often in sociological literature reference is made to the relationship between national and class interests, or to the transformation of the interests of a particular sector of the society into

interests of the society as a whole. For European countries, it does not seem necessary to analyse this transfer systematically. Attention is very rarely paid to the links between the primary units

of a social formation (the family and the community) and the macro-units (the classes) which determine their evolution. Discussion is limited to advances in forms of work, types of enterprises and remuneration, and, in general, to the improvement of the population's living standards.

If it is granted that underdeveloped countries are groups of social classes in the process of becoming nations, it would appear that the problem should be analysed in reverse. It would be a matter of determining the conditions in which national interests become class interests. The answer seems obvious: namely, when the oppressed majority class comes into power; but it is not as simple as that. Without claiming to solve such a far-reaching problem, we would like to show that nowadays, granted that all social classes in the Caribbean share similar characteristics and, as a result, similar national interests, the vested interests of the dominant classes lie in stifling the specific national characteristics which they themselves display.

In the same order of ideas, we would recall that the oppressed classes, in our wide-open societies, have found a way to safeguard their national characteristics, which in no way signifies an open struggle in defence of their economic interests or the assumption of any power in the foreseeable future. The difficulty of transforming national interests into class interests or *vice versa* is precisely, to our mind, the stumbling block in the democratization of the Caribbean, especially if we insist on considering the question of power in terms of a State confined within a given territory.

In the Caribbean, as in every colonized region, certain phenomena appear at the local level, then disappear from the social consciousness (from the standpoint of the dominant classes and the dominant view) to open the way to realities coming from worldwide spheres which, to the oppressed people, are only fads and weird illusions. I would mention two examples of this, one of which will be examined in more detail later.

The Creole dialect based on French was, as indicated by Price-Mars, born of the need for communication between the (first) masters (petty Whites) and their slaves. At the beginning of colonization, it was the language of the so-called French islands. Everyone spoke it and, in general, spoke nothing else. Then French became in-

stitutionalized in France, the Court began to use it; a section of the colonialists drew apart from the local population and, along with other members of the public administration and the newly arrived *grands blancs*, adopted French (Prudent, 1980 and Bernabé).

It is obvious that the substitution was dictated by class interests. It is also evident that the transfer did not happen overnight. The odd thing is that, as if by miracle and in fulfilment of the dreams of the dominant classes, the so-called French islands became French-speaking. And centuries have gone by, and it is still mistakenly believed that in the French Caribbean colonies French is spoken as well as a sub-product (a degenerated version, as Williams would call it) of this language. The ill-informed think that chronologically French came first, and Creole second. Upon this fallacy (of class), has been built a whole series of agencies and institutions (schools, for example) which, logically, can never rid themselves of the abusive imputation.

In the formation of Caribbean societies as well as the upbringing of Caribbean individuals Creole comes before French (and before any other official language for that matter).

The second example, that we shall only touch on, refers to the family. There are few fields of observation as disconcerting as this for the local sociologists. In our artificially articulated societies, the family represents a social innovation. The Caribbean society is not made up of the sum or combination of individual families. On the contrary, the society was formed, chronologically speaking, before the family; and as regards the nuclear family, this emerges only after an improvement, always liable to setbacks, in living standards.

In the case of the Whites, whether pirates, buccaneers or convicts, they formed societies of males who later received cargoes of women, most of them prostitutes, whom they purchased for cash and with whom they organized the so-called family units. As for the Blacks, they were not in a position to create such units. Not only were they mated against their will (and whole islands were entirely reserved for the breeding of Blacks), but father, mother and children were offered as separate goods in the market and were sold on this basis. To establish a stable procreation unit became a feat and a social conquest, both for the

petty Whites and the enslaved Blacks. And it was upon such a social invention as this that all kinds of legal codes, inspired by one version or another of the Judeo-Christian religions, were superimposed.

Thus, on the one side, neither the history of the language nor the history of the family has common roots with what obtains in Europe or Africa. On the other side, language and family are creations of the dominant classes, as are the foundations of Caribbean nationality. What has been said about language and family goes for education, religion, peasantry, land tenure systems, principles of inheritance, relations with community authorities or colonial/national authorities... in a word, the whole oppressed culture becomes a social conquest, a product of class struggles.

It seems to me that the efforts for economic survival fit into a pattern (a rationality), not yet

mastered by scientific reflection. The search for solutions to class conflicts cannot be limited to mere economic interests, to the mere improvement of living standards, without guaranteeing these social innovations and achievements. I maintain, therefore, that the concept of class consciousness, in the study of oppression in the Caribbean, includes the defence of institutions created to improve living conditions. These institutions had to be invented in order to survive colonial oppression. As a whole, they constitute the basis of the oppressed culture and cannot be separated from the defence of the collective economic interests of the dominated classes. Living standards (the result) and way of life (the institutionalized means of achieving this result) are part of the same indivisible unit. The results and the means of achieving them could certainly be improved and developed; but these two dimensions must be included in the same process.

V

The place of national self-expression

The problem is to show how, in the nation-building or decolonization process, certain social classes set themselves apart from the rest of the population and manage to satisfy their material needs at the expense of endogenous institutions. We shall try to identify the different stages of this process and to prove, by the same token, that the local dominant classes stand to benefit if the effort of nation-building is constantly regenerated as an unfulfilled project: the project (or the self-expression) of the emancipated State.

The transformation of a colonized territory into a fragment of the metropolitan country's geography represents only one aspect of the picture. The ultimate goal of colonial public life is to ensure the greatest possible exploitation of the colonized people. This extreme exploitation tends to reduce to a strict minimum the areas necessary for the reproduction of the life of the colonized people, affecting even the framework of their private lives. By denying them the product of their work and, if possible, the vital minimum for their biological reproduction, the col-

onizer at the same time denies them access to the forms of public and private life of the metropolitan country. The conqueror thus unwittingly provides a space for the formalization of family and community structures and thereby of new cultural structures. These aim, *inter alia*, at an optimum distribution of the little which escapes the colonial monopoly of available resources. While breaking up the dominated groups and imposing on them new forms of individuation, this unrestricted form of exploitation paradoxically gives rise to the creation of new forms of social life and of an oppressed culture. In consequence, the emergence of endogenous solutions is one of the contradictory results of colonial exploitation.

These endogenous ways of perceiving, conceiving and reorganizing the environment, naturally based on the surviving traditions of cultures dating from before the conquest (the dissimilar threads mentioned by E. Williams) are systematically looked down upon or, at best, regarded as trivial by the colonizing nation. It must

be conceded, however, that this attitude is not entirely mistaken because, at first sight, these innovations do not jeopardize the colonial system. On the contrary, in the short term, they ensure its reproduction, by allowing the colonized people to receive less than their vital minimum requirements and still survive, to preserve their sanity despite the folly of their situation (remember the African-born enslaved) and to enjoy social solidarity in spite of dehumanizing oppression.

In a word, colonialism tends to destroy the conquered nations while at the same time establishing the conditions necessary for the birth of a new national entity. In the Caribbean, this tendency is exacerbated. The destruction of the conquered nations takes place in an environment different from the habitat in which the survivors of the massacres had to evolve. The African diaspora is not a tribal emigration, but the transfer of isolated individuals whom the colonial system seeks to deprive of any possibility of controlling even their own individual destiny. We have analysed elsewhere the creation of new nations from this breakup and reassembly (Casimir, 1981).

The effort made by exploited people to reorganize themselves into new nations, around cultures which are themselves new, is the object of odious misrepresentations; since these cultures lack institutions specifically responsible for producing knowledge, they are unable even to protect themselves against the aggression of the dominant cultures. The oppressed people remain powerless to deal with the institutions of the colonial system and with the definitions imposed by that system. As a result, they are unable to participate, within the colonial framework, in a collective struggle for the defence of their class interests.

It should be noted that class exploitation within colonialism gives rise to the contradictions observed, in the long run, in social cohesiveness and cultural creation. The parameters of the class struggle which, in this context, is always a struggle for national liberation, are defined in this way.

The interpénétration of class and cultural conflicts is particularly complex in view of the fact that, in the Caribbean, excluding Haiti and Suriname, the vast majority of people share the

two existing cultural systems. We have already mentioned that underdeveloped countries are composed of a collection of social classes striving with difficulty to build a nation. It therefore seems necessary, at this level of the discussion, to analyse how the gulf between colonizers and colonized is transmitted to the latter, dividing them into "masses" and "élites", converting them often into "antagonistic bodies", and transferring beyond the colonial period a class structure capable of interfering with the decolonization and nation-building processes.

In the colonial system it is particularly effective to show off one's cultural alterity and thus secure the solidarity of ethnic associates, if not of equals, when in want of protection from the misdeeds of the conquerors. But in public life, and especially at one's place of work, to show off one's cultural distinctiveness is a sure way of courting disaster.

The inevitability of acculturation/assimilation practices is rooted in this need to refrain from showing signs of one's ethnic and cultural identity in order to enjoy better prospects in life. Inasmuch as the colonized people as a community are not in a position to put an end to national oppression and class-exploitation, individual emancipation or an effort at assimilation is the only possible option if living standards are to be improved. This gives rise to the native public and private administrators: the first wage-earning employees of the Caribbean. This is the basic nucleus of the middle classes. The oppressed people, aspiring quite naturally to a better life, see in that of these administrators (the public servant being the most privileged of all) an alternative to their condition of poverty. All the customs, standards, principles and values which govern these class transfers are expressions of the local dominant culture, a colonial version of the metropolitan culture.

The dynamism of the local dominant culture is subordinated to the advance of the metropolitan country's economic, political and ideological structures. As a result, the acculturation/assimilation process never comes to an end. The middle classes, freed from slavery, servitude or low-paid manual labour, live haunted by the ghost of a double national identity. They must constantly maintain a safe distance between their social class and the underprivileged; this allows

them to gain the colonizers' favours (social promotion) and to guarantee to their descendants the cultural and ideological means needed to safeguard a minimum of material well-being.

And thus, a set of rules and principles relating, at the outset, to public life, tends to penetrate the spheres of the private lives of certain sectors of the local population. The aspiration, undoubtedly legitimate, for an average living standard, and for the preservation of this living standard, calls for a change of life-style when success is achieved. This is possible because, with less exploitation, these sectors gain access to material conditions which allow them to organize their lives in the European way.

This repudiation of the local heritage should not be confused with a lack of knowledge or information concerning these national cultures. It is precisely by admitting and justifying the prevalence of colonial culture that the middle classes build an insurmountable obstacle to their assimilation into Western culture. Recognition of the pre-eminence of the official dominant culture implies that the oppressed culture is visible. Thus, it is not that the middle class does not perceive the national culture with which it is impregnated —whether it likes it or not— but that it refuses to perceive it. This refusal represents the unequivocal expression of the uselessness of the local culture in the practical circumstances in which the middle class lives and works.

Despite this fact, since the middle class must renew its credentials each time the metropolitan country moves towards new development horizons, its constant efforts to adapt itself produce in the end certain qualitative changes in the relations between the oppressed national culture and the dominant culture. The need to reject the national cultures must be understood as an expression of its class interests, while the indefinite reproduction of these same national cultures constitutes the material basis of its existence as a particular class. The acculturation project, or, more precisely, the westernization of the masses, represents the very *raison d'être* of the middle classes. The end product of their activities is to ensure that the colonized milieu will never cease to be a fragment of the metropolitan country, even after independence or emancipation.

The changes in the relations between domi-

nant and oppressed cultures produced by the full development of the middle classes can be illustrated by a description of the fate of the languages spoken in the Caribbean. It is a known fact that in most of the countries of the region the people are at least bilingual. Or rather, they live in a diglossic situation. The basic characteristic of their linguistic structure is that the two languages are never used indiscriminately. Some activities take place in Creole (they generally relate to private or community life and manual work), whereas others take place in the official language (those concerned with public life, particularly politics, legal matters, administration, schooling, European religion).

Since public and private life are organized in different cultural frameworks, and the former tends to stifle the latter, diglossia illustrates the distinct use of the two cultures. In principle, the official culture and the "imperial language" serve primarily to perpetuate the world of colonialism, whereas the oppressed culture and the national language remain the environment par excellence of endogenous creation.

The improvement of living standards in the colonial milieu is conditional on a mastery of the official culture and language. Thus, this "imperial language" tends to be spoken in certain middle-class families, and the forms of organization and values of private life in the metropolitan country concomitantly take root in the indigenous colonial milieu. Hence, at a given point in time in colonial history, the official languages become the mother-tongue of a certain minority. The result of this is the rise of generations barely exposed to the national culture and able to do without the communal solidarity which defines that culture. This is the class of the "petty bourgeoisie" ready to take the place of the colonialists when independence is gained.

The ill effects of this reduced visibility of the national culture should not, however, be exaggerated. A series of complex phenomena occurs: first, because this petty bourgeoisie is not really a dominant class capable of pursuing its development plans autonomously; second, because to carry out its role of intermediary, it must maintain contact with the colonized (or recently freed from colonialism) manual workers; and finally, because in their comings and goings in the metropolitan countries its members soon be-

come aware of their status as second-class citizens and are forced to resort expressly to forms of national solidarity.

In the region, the existence of Creole languages used as *lingua franca* before and after independence gives vigorous reinforcement to the oppressed cultures and makes a total break impossible between the middle and the exploited classes. Several mechanisms must contribute to this phenomenon. Short of more exhaustive research, we shall limit ourselves to the analysis of the use of the official and national languages.

It may be categorically stated that the children and youth of the Caribbean region amuse themselves solely in Creole, and this creates a fundamental ambiguity in the institution par excellence of cultural domination.

"The analysis of the 'terrorist' role of the French language in school", writes F.L. Prudent (1980, pp. 124-125) "would be incomplete if the other side of the coin were forgotten: school is also the place where a good part of the urban petty bourgeoisie discovers and learns Creole".

It should thus be noted that, even in the case of the minority for whom the official language becomes their mother-tongue, the child obtains an intensive knowledge of the vernacular when its circle of interpersonal relations is widened and when it moves about independently within the community. In effect, it would be interesting to examine the use of the vernacular by the middle classes and the local dominant classes in Caribbean countries, as a ritual of entry and initiation into adult life. The use of the vernacular, the language of the nation, stands out in its relations with the dominant language as the medium of disobedience, of individual initiative, of free-

dom discussed with peers and controlled by them.

The problem is that not much is known about what the vernacular, as used by the classes which have detached themselves from the masses, transmits of the national culture. In any event it may be concluded, on the one hand, that in the Caribbean there are social pressures which oppose the isolation of the supporters of the dominant or official cultures from those of the oppressed cultures. No physical or social distance separates the persons and groups immersed in these cultures, except in the cases of Haiti and Suriname. The pluri-cultural situation of the Caribbean is certainly not that of the Andean or Meso-American countries, where there is a veritable gulf between Amerindians and the rest of the population. It is more like the distance between White or *Mestizo* peasantry in Latin America and the urban classes of these regions.

On the other hand, it is undeniable that the dominant and dominated cultures are distinctly different from one another even though they may be closely related. They maintain asymmetric relations; the dominant colonial culture promotes all kinds of measures aimed at destroying and eradicating the local culture, the basis of national cohesion. This cultural war is no more than an aspect of colonial oppression. The colonial dominant culture becomes the official culture of the independent or emancipated State and the cultural war takes an ambiguous turn, which permits it to develop a basis for the evolution of the middle class and petty bourgeois sectors. The self-expression of the independent State adapts itself to that of the nation, but takes care not to formulate a plan which might destroy its class structure.

VI

Obstacles to the development of national self-expression

The efforts to destroy the endogenous sources of reflection and creation are an aspect of class domination in the region. During the decolonization or national liberation process, the local culture gradually becomes more visible. This trend

is irreversible because it corresponds to the need of the new power élites to legitimize their positions. Just like colonization, the decolonization process involves the defence of the interests of certain social classes. The dominant and middle

classes of the Caribbean do all they can to safeguard their material interests, while advancing along the path of decolonization and regional development. Price-Mars published *Ainsi parlait l'oncle* during the second decade of this century; the supporters of the Black Power movement were to turn a deaf ear to his ideas on the use of Creole; and certain of them were even to set themselves up as heralds of a universal French-speaking movement. More recently, once the new élites had gained power in the so-called English-speaking Caribbean, the supporters of the Black Power movement were to oppose White domination and advocate a return to Africa: an Africa as removed from the masses as the culture of the metropolitan countries, and as close to the middle classes as Western culture.

It is therefore necessary fully to understand the deep meaning of the excuses invented by the élites for not adopting the national culture and thus not leaning too far towards a total democratization of social relations, their control and direction. At the same time, the ambiguity and difficulties implicit in any cultural development project aimed at mental decolonization are evident. Such projects help to give legitimacy to the power élites but conflict with their class interests.

Nonetheless, the most difficult point to explain is that the dominated classes do not seem eager to seize the reins of power and to expose the splendour of their national culture for all to see. This is one of the most intimate features of social negotiation in the Caribbean. In contrast with the anxiety felt in some sectors of the middle classes, especially those most susceptible to the brainwashing of the mass media, the calm and carefree attitude of the dominated classes seems to indicate that they do not feel that their national culture is on the verge of losing the war waged on it by the official culture. For the oppressed classes, therefore, it is a question of choosing between, on the one hand, a compromise with the dominant structures, thereby achieving a certain standard of living in the short term and, on the other hand, far-reaching structural reforms, full of glorious prospects for the future, but uncertain.

What differentiates the exploited peoples of the Caribbean from those of most of the South American continent, for example, is that they are

all in touch with the original metropolitan countries and specially with their labour markets. They have access to these opportunities, which should not be underestimated in the light of the levels of unemployment in the region, and are thus assured of a functional control over the components of the official culture and the possibility of emigrating to the metropolitan country.

This results in an overflow of the Caribbean, whose territory covers not only the reduced space where our peoples settled, but also the ghettos and suburbs of almost all the large cities of the North Atlantic. In other words, in the face of the failure of the local dominant classes to halt the increasing decline of the population's standards of living, the latter emigrates and reproduces its cultural forms in the very midst of the capitals of the great empires. As yet there are no endogenous solutions embracing local institutions and cultures to comply with the customs of the masses, while guaranteeing them a better tomorrow. Consequently, with the scattering of the Caribbean nations, it becomes more and more difficult to conceive a project for the future, if the traditional borders inherited from colonialism are to be respected.

For Eric Williams, the politician is a man of culture. However, it is a fact that the inhabitants of the region make no institutionalized effort to carry out the scientific research required to take stock of their cultural heritage and apply it systematically to development. The region has no school of anthropology, still less a centre for cultural research. How could we blame the Caribbean Black Power movement for seeking inspiration in distant Africa, when no work is being done on local culture, as a deliberately chosen subject for scientific reflection and practice, and it remains, in essence, even more distant and inaccessible than African culture?

Price-Mars suggests the use of Creole as being the only bridge between élites and masses. But it is hardly surprising that supporters of the Negritude movement, in spite of their doctrinal stand, should use only French to express themselves. It could certainly be assumed that the national languages of the Caribbean, like any other language, potentially contain all styles of discourse; but it is a fact that these styles have not been developed or codified, much less systemati-

cally taught. The development of a literary, scientific, political or technical form of discourse and, in particular, the creation of a public capable of participating in such discourse, is a collective task which should be institutionalized without delay.

We have tried, in this paper, to show that the oldest form of class exploitation, established with the arrival of the Europeans, consists in depriving oppressed nations of the "power to express their thought". We have recalled that the underdeveloped States of America belong to the same tradition and that the class interests of their dominant sectors are safe only if the national culture has no influence on the creation of options for the future, whereby the anti-colonial tradition would be carried into effect.

We would propose, to paraphrase the Bible, that in the beginning (of the nation) was the Word. The exercise of the nation's right to express its collective thought must be restored. Culture is an experience which is lived, and its agents should be able to use it deliberately to measure up to the problems of private and public life.

We assert that the national culture was created in extraordinarily difficult conditions, so

that the living standards of the oppressed classes might be improved. We suggest, therefore, that, contrary to the strategy of the dominant classes of the Caribbean, the exploited people continue to accept great sacrifices in an attempt to safeguard—if not improve—their living standards, in order to ensure the reproduction of their lifestyle. We also affirm that the best demonstration of this line of behaviour is illustrated in the ensuing immigrations to the large cities of the industrialized countries.

We would conclude that the Caribbean can develop only if it ensures the blossoming of its own way of life and its own culture. It seems to us that this process starts with the institutionalization of a collective effort for systematic research and teaching, at all levels of the local culture, as well as for the development of national languages. The economic problems we face cannot be solved by the manipulation of economic variables. The development of the economy should go hand-in-hand with that of anthropology, because in the Caribbean the daily struggle of the oppressed people shows that, in the formation of their class consciousness, the economic and cultural dimensions are equally important.

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